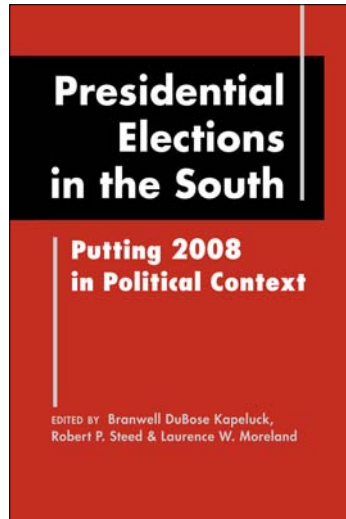


EXCERPTED FROM

Presidential Elections  
in the South:  
Putting 2008 in  
Political Context

edited by  
Branwell DuBose Kapeluck,  
Robert P. Steed and  
Laurence W. Moreland

Copyright © 2010  
ISBN: 978-1-58826-738-2 hc



LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

1800 30th Street, Ste. 314

Boulder, CO 80301

USA

telephone 303.444.6684

fax 303.444.0824

This excerpt was downloaded from the  
Lynne Rienner Publishers website  
[www.rienner.com](http://www.rienner.com)

---

# Contents

<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	vii
<b>1 The Importance of the South in Presidential Politics</b> <i>Robert P. Steed and Laurence W. Moreland</i>	1
<b>Part 1 The Structural Context of Southern Presidential Politics</b>	
<b>2 The Republican South</b> <i>John M. Bruce</i>	13
<b>3 The Transformation of Southern Presidential Primaries</b> <i>Seth C. McKee and Danny Hayes</i>	39
<b>4 Changing Party Fortunes in the South: A Federal Perspective</b> <i>Robert D. Brown and John M. Bruce</i>	71
<b>Part 2 Demographics and the Partisan Landscape</b>	
<b>5 The Emerging Battleground South: Population Change and Changing Politics</b> <i>Susan A. MacManus with Andrew F. Quecan, David J. Bonanza, Christopher J. Leddy Jr., and Brian D. McPhee</i>	99

6	The Latino Vote in 2008 <i>Harold W. Stanley</i>	137
7	Generational Changes <i>Jonathan Knuckey</i>	153
<b>Part 3 Issues, Beliefs, and Race</b>		
8	Issues and Party Coalitions <i>Branwell DuBose Kapeluck</i>	177
9	The Faith Factor <i>John C. Green</i>	215
10	The Legacy of Race in 2008 <i>Joseph A. Aistrup, Emizet F. Kisangani, and Roxanne L. Piri</i>	233
<b>Part 4 Conclusion</b>		
11	The Future of Southern Politics <i>John A. Clark</i>	253
	<i>Bibliography</i>	261
	<i>The Contributors</i>	281
	<i>Index</i>	285
	<i>About the Book</i>	291

# The Importance of the South in Presidential Politics

*Robert P. Steed and Laurence W. Moreland*

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOUTH IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS HAS turned not only on its size as a major region in the United States but also on its frequent unanimity or near unanimity in casting its electoral votes. The eleven states of the old Confederacy have disproportionately supported one party almost to the exclusion of the other often enough to elevate the region's influence and leverage on presidential elections.

The South has a long history of one-partyism. For roughly three-quarters of a century, from the end of Reconstruction into the 1950s, the region was overwhelmingly Democratic. In the disputed presidential election of 1876, three states of the former Confederacy—Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana—cast their electoral votes for Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. In 1880, all eleven southern states voted Democratic, and it was not until 1920, when Tennessee cast its electoral votes for Warren G. Harding, that this regional solidarity was broken, an impressive run of ten consecutive elections. Southern support for the Democratic Party's presidential candidate held firm even in years of Republican landslides as, for example, in 1904 when the eleven southern states were joined only by Kentucky and Maryland in casting electoral votes for the Democratic ticket. In 1920, when Tennessee broke ranks, only one other state, Kentucky, joined the remaining ten southern states in voting Democratic.

In 1924, southern Democratic solidarity was restored in the face of another Republican landslide (the only other state voting Democratic was Oklahoma). The election in 1928 caused the most serious crack in regional Democratic support since Reconstruction when five of the eleven southern states cast their electoral votes for Herbert Hoover over the Catholic, anti-Prohibition Democrat, Al Smith.<sup>1</sup> This breach was quickly mended, howev-

er, as the region returned to Democratic solidarity by supporting Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, a pattern that would continue unbroken through the next three elections. In summary, the South unanimously voted Democratic in fifteen of the seventeen presidential elections from 1880 through 1944, with 1920, and especially 1928, being the only exceptions. If we disaggregate these regional voting patterns to consider the electoral votes of the individual states in each of the seventeen elections during this sixty-four-year period, the Democrats carried the southern electoral vote in the individual states a remarkable 96.7 percent of the time.

The 1948 election marked the beginning of a two-decade transition in patterns of presidential voting in the South. A floor fight over the inclusion of a civil rights statement in the Democratic platform that year prompted a number of southern delegates to walk out of the national convention and form the States' Rights Party. That party, with South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond as its standard-bearer, won the electoral votes of four Deep South states (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and South Carolina) and one electoral vote in Tennessee.<sup>2</sup>

Even though the Democrats took measures to mend their southern fences—for example, the southern senators John Sparkman (Alabama), Estes Kefauver (Tennessee), and Lyndon B. Johnson (Texas) were selected as the party's vice-presidential candidates in 1952, 1956, and 1960, respectively—the party never again restored regional solidarity to its pre-1948 level. In both 1952 and 1956, Dwight Eisenhower won electoral votes in the South, and in a real test of the Republicans' staying power in the region in 1960, Richard Nixon carried three states (see Bartley and Graham 1975; Lamis 1990).

In 1964, an election that was complicated by the emotions and conflict associated with the civil rights movement, Barry Goldwater carried the five Deep South states where white voters looked with favor on his general states' rights conservatism and his perceived support for segregation generated by his opposition to the 1964 Civil Rights Act in the US Senate. Even though Goldwater's support came from groups very different from those who supported Eisenhower and Nixon, this election marked a continuing erosion of Democratic strength in the South.

The 1968 election continued the pattern of Democratic decline in southern presidential politics. The former Democratic governor of Alabama, George C. Wallace, running as the American Independent Party candidate, carried the same Deep South states carried by Goldwater in 1964; additionally, he received one electoral vote (out of thirteen cast) in North Carolina. Republican candidate Richard Nixon carried five southern states, and Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey carried only Texas. Thus, over the twenty-year period from 1948 through 1968, the South's electoral votes were consistently divided among the Democrats, the Republicans, and, at both ends of the period, strong regional third parties.

From 1972 through 2004, the South once again tended strongly toward one-partyism in its presidential voting, this time in favor of the Republicans. Republicans carried a majority of the southern states in eight of the nine elections in this period and carried all of the southern states in five of the nine elections (1972, 1984, 1988, 2000, and 2004). Only when the Democrats nominated a southerner to head their ticket did their fortunes in the region improve appreciably. In 1976, Jimmy Carter, buoyed by his status as a native southerner and by the anti-Republican and antiestablishment sentiments generated by the Watergate scandal and the subsequent resignation of President Richard Nixon, was able to win the electoral votes of ten of the eleven southern states. Carter's regional support eroded quickly, however, and in his 1980 reelection bid he won only his home state of Georgia in the South. In 1992 and 1996, the southern team of Bill Clinton and Al Gore succeeded in winning four southern states (with two of those being their home states of Arkansas and Tennessee both years). It is of special significance that in three of the four elections with southern Democratic presidential candidates between 1972 and 2004, the Democrats were still unable to win a majority of the states in the region.

Clearly, Republican presidential strength in the South from 1972 through 2004 did not rise to the level of Democratic presidential strength in the region from 1880 through 1944. Still, Republican dominance of presidential politics in the region was impressive. Again, if we disaggregate presidential elections in this period to consider state-level electoral results, Republicans won these elections in the southern states 87.7 percent of the time. Although this is lower than the comparable Democratic winning percentage for the period 1880–1944, it is still remarkable.

In short, if we consider southern presidential electoral patterns from 1880 through 2004, a period of 124 years and thirty-two presidential elections, the South has demonstrated strong one-partyism for all but roughly two decades (and six elections). That translates into 104 years and twenty-six elections with almost solid support for one party or the other. In twenty of these elections, the southern vote was unanimous, and in three other elections it fell one state short of being unanimous (although one of those was in 1976, when the vote deviated from the dominant pattern of the period).

Historically, the South's one-party solidarity has leveraged the region's influence in presidential elections beyond what it otherwise would have been. First the Democrats and then the Republicans (after 1968) came to see the South as a reliable stronghold upon which to base a national electoral strategy. With the certainty of the South's block of electoral votes, the favored party's candidate had a solid start toward winning the electoral votes necessary for victory and had, therefore, the luxury of targeting and concentrating on selected states in other parts of the country, knowing that the candidate had to win far fewer of those states than the opponent. The

other party's candidate was, conversely, forced to campaign in, and win, the bulk of the remaining states to win the election. From the late 1800s into the 1950s, for example, the solidarity of the South in presidential elections led the Republicans to pursue the so-called Lincoln electoral strategy—that is, conceding all or most of the South to the Democrats while carrying most or all of the Midwest, East, and West Coast.

Following 1968, as the parties' respective fortunes changed in the South, the Democrats were, ironically, forced to pursue their own version of the Lincoln strategy. Inasmuch as Republicans could usually count on winning the South's electoral votes plus a few other reliably Republican states in the Midwest and the Mountain West, they had only to pick up a handful of the battleground states for victory. In recent elections, the South's 153 electoral votes accounted for approximately 57 percent of the 270 votes needed to win, so Republicans tended to be highly advantaged at the outset. Of course, Democrats during the post-1968 period had their own areas of strength, but even so, they had a consistently more difficult task than Republicans, as Democrats had to come close to winning nearly every battleground state.

Being a regional base upon which national election strategy was organized often elevated the South to a level of influence disproportionate to its size in national party councils and among national party leaders. Prior to World War II national Democratic leaders were reluctant to challenge the Jim Crow system of racial discrimination in the South in part because they did not want to alienate southern Democrats and risk losing the region's support. Indeed, this remained a concern to the Democrats well into the post-World War II period, as evidenced by that party's ongoing efforts during the 1950s to bring the South back into the coalition after the 1948 States' Rights Party revolt and by John F. Kennedy's avoidance of full-scale support of the civil rights movement, at least until shortly before his assassination in 1963. Kennedy's reluctance to endorse the civil rights agenda was prompted by a number of factors (including his concerns with Cold War foreign policy and his recognition of the power of southerners in Congress), but the fresh memories of his extremely close 1960 election and his concern with losing southern voter support in an expected hard reelection battle in 1964 were important.

As the southern party system changed in the 1960s, the region assumed central importance to Republican campaign strategy and, consequently, to that party's political agenda. Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign saw the potential of developing a southern base for the party by appealing to conservative social and political orientations of many white voters in the region. The earlier inroads made by Eisenhower and Nixon had shown that traditional Republican positions regarding business interests and fiscal conservatism resonated with at least some middle-class southerners in the

region's growing urban and suburban areas, and Goldwater's message of limited government, coupled with his vote against the 1964 Civil Rights Act, added a more overtly racial dimension to the mix. For Goldwater, the South became his theoretical campaign base, as indicated by this prescription of the Republican National Committee for winning the 1964 presidential election (quoted in Cosman 1966, 41):

Barry Goldwater will take all 128 electoral votes of the eleven Southern States! In 1964 Goldwater will give "the solid South" dramatic new meaning! This is the key to Republican success!

In addition to sweeping the South, Goldwater will lead our party to a tremendous victory by carrying the dependable Republican states of the Midwest, Rocky Mountains, and Northern New England.

The secret to Republican victory lies in the fact that Senator Goldwater can convert a past weakness of the Republican Party into great strength. He alone can tap this new reservoir of votes, not only for President, but also for control of Congress.

Seeing the opportunity to build on increasing southern disaffection with the national Democratic Party, Republicans in 1968 focused on developing a strategy designed to wrench the region away from the Democrats with a view toward creating a southern base of its own. From 1968 forward this new "Southern Strategy" became Republican gospel. Aided by Kevin Phillips, his shrewd and perceptive chief elections and campaigns analyst, Richard Nixon in his 1968 campaign courted the (white, Protestant) South in almost every way possible. He promised to appoint a southerner to the Supreme Court (not that the South was unrepresented, as Alabama's Hugo Black famously sat on the Court in 1968), and he used code-phrases such as a return to "law and order" and getting "welfare cheats" off the rolls, phrases that in the South during the 1960s were taken as unsympathetic references to race and the civil rights movement.

The success of Nixon's effort in 1968 was limited by the presence of George Wallace in the race, but it continued to be the centerpiece of Republican campaign politics. Nixon's 1968 Southern Strategy was subsequently published by Kevin Phillips in his remarkably prescient *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969), arguing that support from southern whites (together with other factors) would soon result in a new electoral alignment, one in which Republicans would be highly competitive if not dominant. Phillips was eventually proved correct, of course, but not as soon as he expected; Watergate certainly slowed, but did not stop, the shift of southern whites to the Republican Party. The task of completing the development of the Southern Strategy fell to Ronald Reagan, whose efforts at wooing the white South were without peer. (For an excellent account and interpretation of these events, see Black and Black 2002; a useful companion and update for Phillips's work is Aistrup 1996.) The result was an



increasingly close programmatic alignment between the South and the Republican Party and, consequently, increased influence for the region in the party nationally.

The influence of the South that is rooted in the region's historical record of solidarity has had three additional consequences for presidential electoral politics. The first is that it has traditionally served as a protective wall against national political tides that run against the favored party. For example, from 1880 through 1928, when the Republican Party was dominant in national politics and often won true landslide victories in presidential elections, the South's solid support of the Democratic Party gave that party an ongoing base upon which it could rebuild national strength. In this sense, one-partyism serves to maintain and perpetuate the national two-party system. Although scholars and others might debate the merits of such an outcome, those in the weaker party would usually see this as a significant benefit.

Second, population shifts to the Sunbelt have resulted in a growing proportion of votes for the South in the Electoral College, so much so that the South today has the largest regional total of electoral votes. Consequently, regional solidarity tends to be an even more important element in national campaign strategy. In the 1944 presidential election, the eleven states of the Old South had 127 electoral votes (about 24 percent of the total and about 48 percent of the total needed to win). By 2004, the South's electoral votes had swollen to 153 (more than 28 percent of the total and almost 57 percent of the total needed to win). In 2012 (the first presidential election after the 2010 census), the South is widely expected to gain five electoral votes (and possibly six), raising the total to 158 (more than 29 percent of the total and nearly 59 percent of the total needed to win). To be sure, most of the growth has come in just two states (Florida and Texas), but other southern states (Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia) have also increased their electoral votes or will likely do so as a consequence of the 2010 census.

Third, the importance of the South in presidential elections has carried over into the presidential nomination process. Since the 1980s, the South has played a disproportionate role in the primary process that ultimately selects the presidential nominees.

The idea of a southern regional primary dates to at least 1975, an idea spearheaded by the Southern Legislative Conference (one of four regional legislative groups, operating under the Council of State Governments, which encourages intergovernmental cooperation at the state level). (For a history of the southern regional primary, subsequently known as Super Tuesday, see especially Stanley and Hadley 1987; see also Bullock 1991; Clark and Haynes 2002. For an extended and detailed discussion of the South in the nomination process, see Chapter 3 in this volume.) Beginning to push the idea seriously in 1985, the Southern Legislative Conference succeeded in

getting the regional primary concept implemented in 1988. Mostly promoted by Democrats who thought it would help shift attention to the South as well as smooth the way for a moderate candidate from the South to obtain the Democratic presidential nomination, ten of the eleven southern states (plus Kentucky and five non-southern states) participated in the first of the Super Tuesday events, held early in the primary season (early March 1988).

South Carolina, however, chose not to participate in the first Super Tuesday and instead eventually succeeded in scheduling a primary on the Saturday before Super Tuesday. Although the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary, both held in January of presidential years, continued to attract enormous media and candidate attention, the South Carolina primary was considered the gateway to success in the South. Unlike Iowa and New Hampshire, South Carolina, back then and today, has a large minority population (important for Democratic candidates); in addition, the state was often seen as a precursor for what might happen a few days later on Super Tuesday. For candidates who did not do well in either Iowa or New Hampshire, South Carolina became a crucial firewall state, almost essential to maintaining a candidacy. For example, in 1988 then-Vice President George H. W. Bush virtually assured his nomination (over Senator Robert Dole) by winning South Carolina's gateway primary, then sweeping the remaining ten states of the old Confederacy. Similarly, in 2000, after a surprise loss to Senator John McCain in the New Hampshire primary (McCain had skipped Iowa to concentrate on New Hampshire), Governor George W. Bush of Texas stopped the bleeding in South Carolina's bitterly fought primary, going on to win the other southern primaries, the nomination, and the general election (see Clark and Haynes 2002).

Today, the influence of southern primaries has waned due to each party's tweaking of its primary season, rescheduling both southern and non-southern primaries so that the primary season is now frontloaded, which generally works to the advantage of preprimary frontrunners. Even so, the South Carolina primary remains the first in the region and one of the first in the nation, and thus it retains great potential for candidates as they try to move successfully through the gateway to the South.

In short, the South has a long and important place in presidential politics in the nation. The region's role has evolved in significant ways for more than a century, and it continues to be a focus of scholars interested in understanding southern as well as national politics (especially presidential politics). The large body of literature examining the South and presidential politics is evidence of this ongoing interest and is recognition of the topic's importance (see Stanley 2006).

This volume continues this rich tradition of scholarship by presenting a series of original works that provide context and analysis for the 2008 presidential election in the South. The three chapters in Part 1 combine with this

brief introductory chapter to provide a foundation for the chapters that follow. Chapters 2 and 4 detail the South's role in national presidential politics since roughly World War II: Chapter 2 broadens the historical regional perspective summarized here in Chapter 1, and Chapter 4 analyzes the key connections between political developments at the state level and presidential politics in the South. Chapter 3 extends Chapter 1's brief overview of the South's increasingly important role in the presidential nomination process.

The remaining chapters present detailed discussions of a number of topics central to an understanding of southern electoral politics and examine how they help illuminate the 2008 presidential election in the South. The three chapters in Part 2 examine in more detail the interplay between key demographic patterns and the evolving partisan and electoral politics of the South. Susan MacManus and her colleagues (Chapter 5) provide an overview of recent demographic developments in the region, and Harold Stanley (Chapter 6) and Jonathan Knuckey (Chapter 7) build on this foundation by offering detailed analyses of how the emergence of a growing Hispanic population (and vote) and generational change have impacted southern politics, especially in 2008. The three chapters in Part 3 provide a broader historical context and analyses of variables such as race, religion, and policy issues related to southern voting patterns in 2008. Each chapter addresses relevant aspects of the recent (i.e., post-World War II) political history of the South in greater depth and with more focus than this introductory historical sketch; collectively they develop a more complete picture of the evolution and current importance of the region in presidential politics. Finally, in his concluding chapter (Part 4, Chapter 11), John Clark synthesizes key points made in the preceding chapters and identifies some major conclusions regarding their implications for the future shape of southern politics (and the role of the South in national politics).

The 2008 presidential election in the South deviated from recent electoral patterns in the region in important ways. A well-funded, charismatic, nonsouthern, African American Democrat ran an unusually energetic campaign throughout the region and managed to break the Republican grip on the South's electoral votes evident in both 2000 and 2004 (and the majority of elections since 1968). The 2008 election is, therefore, an especially interesting election to analyze in larger historical context. Whatever its long-term implications for southern and national politics—whether it ultimately proves to be the beginning of longer transformation of southern presidential electoral patterns or a short-term deviation based on a set of idiosyncratic variables—the election can be considered a watershed in US politics.

In the early 1990s, Earl and Merle Black argued in *The Vital South* (1992, p. 366) that the South is “at the center of struggles to define winners and losers in American politics.” It is in that broad context that we approach the analyses that follow.

**Notes**

1. For more details on the defection of Democrats in the South in the 1928 presidential election, see Key (1949).

2. For a more complete discussion of the 1948 election, see Key (1949), Lamis (1988), and Kirkendall (1971).